



US Army Corps Of Engineers

Norfolk District

News Release

Contact: Gerald Rogers or Diana Bailey
Phone: (757) 441-7606/7673

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 16, 2003
#03-08

Slave skeletal remains set for reburial June 21

NORFOLK, Va. — After extensive scientific research and analysis by the Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with state historical agencies, the skeletal remains of a young slave girl discovered in 1998 will be reburied during a ceremony at 11 a.m. Saturday, June 21, at the First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Va.

Suffolk's First Baptist and Little Bethel Baptist churches will jointly conduct the reburial ceremony, which features statements of expression by several civic and religious area leaders. Dr. Jerome Ross, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Studies at Virginia Union University, Richmond, Va., will deliver the eulogy.

A gravesite service led by the Rev. Donald Allen will immediately follow the ceremony at Oakland Cemetery on Godwin Boulevard in Chuckatuck. The service will feature processional music by an African drummer, a libation or religious ritual to link those attending with the past and a musical tribute to women in the form of an old Negro spiritual. During the ceremony, there will also be a vigil in which women will release butterflies and doves in memory of this woman.

Also, filmmakers Resilience9Productions and Lawville Productions will produce a documentary about the reburial entitled "Treading a Slave Woman's Path." Their goal is to make the documentary available to the Virginia Department of Education and local schools.

In 1998, a contractor working for the Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk District, discovered human remains in an unmarked grave during a cleanup effort at the Former Nansemond Ordnance Depot. The single human burial was found on the James River beachfront in Suffolk, adjacent to the Interstate 664 Monitor-Merrimac Bridge-Tunnel on property now owned by the Virginia Community College System.

SKELETAL SLAVE REMAINS

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Corps officials and other federal and state agencies believed that there might have been slave quarters at this location, judging by scientific and historic data collected, and artifacts unearthed during test excavations in the area surrounding the site. The artifacts were dated between 1780 and 1810.

Public outreach efforts began in January 2003, following a variety of local, regional and national media coverage. The Army Corps received letters of support from the office of Virginia Congressman Randy Forbes (R-4th Dist.) and four local churches expressing interest in participating in the reburial effort. After weeks of meticulous planning, the Corps approved a reburial and gravesite ceremony that would conform to state law.

“Seventeen members of the Suffolk community graciously donated their time, resources and inspiration to help plan what promises to be an unforgettable, educational and uplifting commemorative memorial service,” says Corps Program Manager Adriane James.

The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

For more information, call Corps Program Manager Adriane James at (757) 441-7701.

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